

Comptes rendus / Book Reviews

ALVAH, Donna — *Unofficial Ambassadors: American Military Families Overseas and the Cold War, 1946–1965*. New York: New York University Press, 2007. Pp. 289.

In *Unofficial Ambassadors: American Military Families Overseas and the Cold War, 1946–1965*, historian Donna Alvah illuminates the ways in which US military families abroad influenced global perceptions of American diplomacy, state, society, and culture. During the early Cold War period, United States military spouses and children stationed in Western Europe and Asia sought to cultivate neighbouring support and friendly relations with local people on- and off-base. By serving as “unofficial ambassadors” of “the American way of life,” these ordinary Americans buttressed local US military efforts and global, Cold War diplomatic objectives. “Families ... could exercise international influence and advance diplomatic aims by representing a nonmilitaristic facet of the United States,” Alvah contends. “Wives, children, and servicemen in their domestic roles as husbands and fathers could exert soft-power influence that both complemented and tempered the United States’ hard-power martial presence” (p. 227). Through multiple formal and informal cultural encounters with residents of occupied and host countries, American military families exercised a friendly and “feminine” form of American global power, consequently proliferating the myth of US exceptionalism.

As Washington envisioned the establishment of a new Cold War order after World War II, military officials encouraged military families stationed overseas to participate in American foreign relations by fraternizing with non-Americans. In the spirit of cultural internationalism, husbands, wives, and children displayed American leadership, generosity, and benevolence as they visibly took part in myriad local events and humanitarian causes. American servicemen, at this time, were expected to “teach” local families the fruits of democracy and American culture. Such efforts depicted American dominance in a paternalist light, as “portrayals of servicemen with children ... appealed to the idea of international family ties, though always with the American men in the role of adult benefactors” (p. 57). “The frequency of familial metaphors in representing relationships between servicemen and host nationals, as well as actual family relationships,” Alvah convincingly argues, “illustrates the centrality of ideas

about the family to relations between the U.S. military and peoples of foreign countries" (p. 60).

US military wives, for their part, actively advanced global aims and participated in the Cold War by forging informal international alliances and assisting disadvantaged peoples, as well as promoting American "values." Through their "feminine good will," white American women acted as US diplomatic agents, as they "represented sincere efforts to do good for those who were less privileged than Americans, while helping to ease Americans' discomfort with and even morally justify their nation's global dominance" (p. 82). On the Pacific island of Okinawa, for instance, Marian Merritt and other US military spouses sought to assist Okinawans in their postwar recovery, protect them from peril, and obtain their allegiance to the American Cold War effort. While perceiving local residents as inferior, childlike peoples in need of American guardianship, they constructed themselves as maternal protectors. "This *maternalism* tries to ease the negative effects of *paternalistic* military control while reinforcing justifications for the Cold war domination of Okinawa by the United States," Alvah contends (pp. 168–69). In an attempt to present a more friendly and compassionate picture of the American occupation of Okinawa, military wives "sought to counteract the negative effects of the military through nurturing, intimate interactions with Okinawans while maintaining the power differential" (p. 178).

Unofficial Ambassadors serves as an excellent contribution to the existing scholarship on gender in US foreign relations and American internationalism. By highlighting the agency of US military wives and children abroad, Alvah draws necessary attention to the involvement of non-state actors in American diplomacy. She fails, however, to offer a substantial discussion regarding the role of US servicemen when off-duty and their interactions with local residents. How did these husbands embrace local culture and espouse these social roles? Did they engage with host citizens in the same ways as their wives? Did they promote a feminine, non-militaristic vision of the so-called American way of life? Alvah, in addition, leads the reader to believe that an overwhelming majority of service wives were either subservient to military demands or avid supporters of cultural exchange. One is, therefore, left to wonder how many American women and families rejected local culture and the advocacy of soft power. Surely, "Ugly Americans," such as those present in the bestselling novel by William J. Lederer and Eugene Burdick, disrupted official American plans, thus negatively affecting official and unofficial US cultural relations with the world.

Despite these minor qualms, Donna Alvah's work is of utmost importance to international historians, as it embraces a stimulating cultural approach that obliges us to question the conventional view of who, how, and where American diplomacy is conducted. Alvah, above all, successfully fuses family relations and American diplomacy to demystify the hegemonic discourse of US exceptionalism. The United States government and its citizenry, after all, were not *destined* — nor was it their duty — to occupy foreign countries in the aftermath of World War II. The language of exceptionalism — and its consequent actions — served as a means to manufacture consent both at home and abroad and to bolster

American expansionist strategy. Gender relations and family metaphors played a central role in promoting the myth of US exceptionalism, as the themes of paternalism and maternalism facilitated the enactment of the United States' global power. Non-state actors, regardless of gender, race, religion, class, or age, also served as significant agents of US diplomacy and, through inter-cultural relations, played a decisive role in massaging the United States' image abroad. The United States' interactions with foreign Others, whether in Okinawa, West Germany, or elsewhere, also reveal how Americans imagined themselves and subsequently acted as "natural" leaders of the "free world."

After reading this book, one can conclude that many parallels can be drawn between American foreign relations and family dynamics. As a result, we may come to understand better how and why many Americans, whether consciously or not, continue to view themselves as the "fathers," "mothers," "big brothers," and "big sisters" of an invented global family.

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BITTERMANN, Rusty, and McCALLUM, Margaret — *Lady Landlords of Prince Edward Island: Imperial Dreams and the Defence of Property*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008. Pp. 207.

In the 1760s, most of Prince Edward Island's 1.4 million acres was granted in 20,000-acre lots to about 100 proprietors. None of those proprietors was female. Yet, of the remaining 57 estates, comprising roughly 300,000 acres, expropriated under the 1875 *Land Purchase Act*, women owned at least 24. In this volume, Rusty Bittermann and Margaret McCallum examine four "lady landlords," representing two generations of women who inherited estates on Prince Edward Island between 1785 and 1866. Sisters Anne and Jane Saunders inherited their estates from their father and great-uncle, who were among the original proprietors. Anne predeceased her husband, Robert Dundas, Lord Melville, and her estate eventually reverted to her eldest male heir. Jane, having survived her husband, John Fane, Lord Westmorland, regained control of one of her Prince Edward Island lots and bequeathed it to her daughter, Georgiana Fane. Fane gained control of the second lot upon the death of her younger brother. Charlotte Sullivan inherited her four lots from her father, a third-generation Island landlord. All four women were absentee landlords, although three of the four visited Prince Edward Island for extended periods.

Precisely how did these four women fit into the broader context? The Saunders sisters, representing the first generation of "lady landlords," were minors when their father died. They came into their inheritance upon marriage, at the turn of the nineteenth century, a time when calls for escheat were becoming common in response to Island proprietors' failure both to pay arrears in quit rents and to meet the settlement terms of their grants. As married women,